

Purchasing Firewood—Use Common Sense

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The Bureau of Weights and Measures is charged with enforcing laws dealing with the buying and selling of commodities that are offered by weight, measure or count. One of the common commodities trading this time of year is firewood—especially “seasoned” firewood. Unfortunately, this office continues to receive complaints from consumers that they received less firewood than was offered by a firewood dealer.

Although we are generally successful in resolving these issues, a recent complaint is an example of the frustration this office has in bringing about justice when a consumer has been “shorted”.

This consumer in the southern part of the state answered an advertisement offering an “accurate cord” (as compared to an inaccurate cord?) of firewood for \$200 plus delivery. She ordered one cord for \$200 plus a \$40 delivery charge. The only thing she knew about the seller was that he called himself Ralph. When the driver arrived, he insisted on cash. When the customer asked for a receipt or invoice, the driver refused. She then paid him the cash and took possession of the wood. After stacking, she believed she had only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cord. She then called the bureau.

An assigned investigator measured not $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cord but only $\frac{5}{8}$ of a cord—the monetary damage—\$75. Even worse, we had very little evidence to assist her. We did not know who the seller or driver was, nor did we have proof that a transaction had even taken place since there was no invoice or receipt. In addition when we tried to trace the phone number, it had been disconnected and the newspaper that printed the advertisement required a subpoena in order for us to access the information. A subpoena will also be required to access the phone records.

I would like to again remind consumers to use common sense when buying firewood for the first time:

1. Ask friends or neighbors for a referral. There is no use for you reinventing the wheel.
2. If you answer a blind advertisement, ask for pertinent information, e.g., price including delivery, quality (seasoned or green), species (oak, beech, ash, etc., mixed hardwood) and the name of the seller.
3. Upon delivery, examine the wood before it is dumped.
4. If you pay cash, **ask and insist on a receipt or invoice** (remember, if it’s not written down, it never happened). If the driver/seller argues or refuses, do not pay. Make sure you know whom you’re dealing with. If you can’t make out the signature, ask how to spell the name. Feel free to discreetly write down the plate number of the delivery vehicle.

The seller is required to present the purchaser an invoice, but if the seller fails to do so, the purchaser should insist. The required items on the invoice are:

1. The name and address of the vendor;
2. The name and address of the purchaser;
3. The date delivered;
4. The quantity delivered and the quantity upon which the price is based, (the price per cord) if this differs from the delivered quantity;
5. The price of the amount delivered; and
6. The identity in the most descriptive terms commercially practicable, (e.g., mixed hardwood) including any quality representation (e.g., seasoned, green) made in connection with the sale.

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